CHAPTER EIGHT

TRACKING THE COURSE OF THE SAVAGE TONGUE
PLACE-NAMES AND LINGUISTIC DIFFUSION IN EARLY BRITAIN

David N. Parsons

MY rather unwieldy title echoes a phrase from the thunderous invective of Gildas, the 6th-century British churchman. In an open letter to the politicians of his day he declaims that:

> In just retribution for former crimes there spread from sea to sea a fire heaped up by the hand of the impious easterners. It devastated all the towns and countryside round about, and once alight did not subside until it had burned almost the whole surface of the island, and was licking the western ocean with its savage red tongue.[1]

The impious easterners, of course, are the Anglo-Saxons, sweeping across Britain from east to west. Gildas, I imagine, was not intending a pun with his *lingua trux*, 'savage tongue' (though the word-play would appear to work in Latin as in English), but it attracted me. For besides the devastation and political conquest, the Anglo-Saxons were bringing with them their ungodly Germanic language, which came, in relatively short order, to supplant British and Latin from east to west, and south to north, across most of what became England. Gildas is thus a contemporary witness to events that underlie a significant linguistic replacement in north-western Europe.

He is not an unproblematic witness, of course, and one should take with a pinch of salt many of the particulars of his testimony;[2] but in its simplest form, a spreading conquest of the island by Germanic-speaking incomers from the east, it is hardly controversial—apparently consistent with archaeological data, and supported by writers of the following centuries, and by linguistic geography.[3] For a plethora of reasons it is

1 This is the translation in Ireland 1996, 168. For the Latin text see Winterbottom 1978, 97. Winterbottom translates the key phrase 'fierce red tongue' (p. 27), which is unexceptionable, though 'savage' is time-honoured: see, e.g., Giles 1906, 311.

2 See, e.g., various contributions to Lapidge & Dumville 1984.

3 There is of course the ever-present controversy about how many Anglo-Saxons were involved in introducing

parsons.indd 169 19/01/2010 19:29:14

difficult to conceive of English as, in origin, anything other than a western salient of a language-group, Germanic, that is centred, and surely has its origins in the centre-north of the European continent.

To my knowledge no one has ever seriously suggested otherwise, and I am not about to entertain the idea now. But it is in the nature of examining 'Celticization from the West' that we should reflect hard on some of the things that we have previously assumed. The long-held view, at least until recent years, that Celtic language spread to the south-west and north-west of Europe from a core in the centre of the continent is one that we are invited to challenge (cf. Koch 2007, 9–17).

My work for some years has principally been in the field of place-name studies, and it is specifically the question of whether place-name distributions can throw any light on the direction of early Celtic diffusion that I want to consider. My first impulse in seeking an answer is to reach for parallels from the territory and period that is most familiar to me, Britain in the early Middle Ages. Hence the appeal to Gildas. For one of the results, of course, of the Germanicization of what became England, was the establishment of large numbers of English-language place-names across the country. The question I have to ask myself, before turning to early Celts, is this: if we did not know, from Gildas and the rest, which way Germanic language spread across England, could we deduce it from place-name evidence alone?

When put so bluntly, it must be conceded at once that this is a question difficult to answer satisfactorily. The problem homes in at once on the greatest weakness of place-names in historical investigation: a lack of chronological precision. Place-names, I would contend, have an enormous amount to offer in a variety of ways: above all, they tell us a great deal about where different languages have been spoken; in addition they often illustrate interaction between languages, and they tell us about aspects of society, administration, land-use, belief and perception. But they tend to resist enquiry into the ultimate date of their coinage. A place-name is at least as old as the date of the document that first records it (itself quite often difficult to establish with certainty), but how much older? A handful of Anglo-Saxon names are recorded around the end of the seventh century AD, two and a half centuries or so after the traditional date of arrival of the first Germanic-speaking settlers; the vast majority of Anglo-Saxon period names are first recorded hundreds of years later again, with the majority appearing for the first time in the Domesday Book, the late eleventh-century survey compiled by the Norman conquerors. Yet reflected in these late, and later, sources, we assume, there are names that were given in the earliest decades of the invasions, no doubt rubbing shoulders with names that arose throughout the following centuries. If we are to understand the earliest phases—and that, of course, is fundamental to the question of where a language

the language (for recent assessments see various contributions to Higham 2007); and there is the new, and undoubtedly controversial, suggestion that Germanic language may have been established in eastern Britain before the arrival of the Romans (Oppenheimer 2006, 267–92). It does not seem to be disputed, even by Oppenheimer, that the language arrived from the European Continent (brought, he suggests, by the Belgae), and that the direction of diffusion in Britain was from east to west.

parsons.indd 170 19/01/2010 19:29:14

originally came from and in which direction it was travelling—we have to find ways of stratifying the name-types and distinguishing early from late.[4]

Now, it must be admitted that, in so far as this has seemed possible at all in English-language names, it has often depended, at least in part, on a comparison of name-distribution with the received historical narrative. Take that away and the implications of the distribution become much less clear. We might cite, for instance, the example of *throp*—the native English equivalent of the more familiar Scandinavian *thorp*, which in names like Scunthorpe and Grimethorpe is common in the east and north of the country, the so-called Danelaw. *Throp* and *thorp* both mean a 'hamlet' or 'outlying settlement'; the English cognate survives in village-names like Adlestrop and Hatherop in Gloucestershire. Its distribution in southern England is marked, for whilst it is found in a band down the middle of the country, it neither appears in the far south-east, Kent and Sussex, nor the far south-west, Devon and Cornwall. These circumstances have found a complex chronological explanation: on the one hand, the Anglo-Saxon settlers of Kent and Sussex came from a northerly region of the Continent—Danish Jutland—which had not, by the 5th- and 6th-centuries, yet adopted the *thorp*-term; on the other, its absence from Devon and Cornwall indicates that the term had passed into disuse among the southern English by, say, the 8th century, when Devon, at least, was settled by the advancing Anglo-Saxons.[5] Yet all this argumentation would collapse if we had no historical backbone against which to measure it. We would be left—as we are left in the case of many, many words—with a restricted distribution and a series of question-marks as to why that should be. Chronology is always a possible factor, but dialectal 'preference', the apparent accident by which one region comes to promote one term above another, is another factor that is usually very hard to dismiss.[6]

Having said this, there are still a few important names and name-types which look relevant to the present problem. Above all, for the early Anglo-Saxons, there are the *-ingas* names: group- or clan-names denoting the descendants or followers, usually, of eponymous individuals. The *-ingas* groups give us names like Hastings (followers of Hǣsta, Hǣsta-people) and Reading (followers of Rēada, Rēada-people); combined with *hām* 'homestead' they give us the likes of Nottingham and Birmingham ('homestead of the Snot/Beorma-people'). On a range of measures this type of place-name looks significantly early. The overall distribution is heavily weighted towards the eastern half of the island, and, moreover, it complements extensive evidence for the same types of name in both Germany and Scandinavia. More than that, however, there is something

4 It is not appropriate here to give extensive references to discussions of chronology in English place-names. The most approachable overview is in Gelling 1988. I take up various general issues in Parsons forthcoming.

5 For the argument see Smith 1956, II, 216. But see also the following note.

6 In the case of *throp* I think that Smith's chronological explanation is unlikely: see Cullen et al forthcoming. For a range of challenging distributions involving the topographical names drawn from the boundary-clauses of Anglo-Saxon charters see Kitson 1995. For most distributions a combination of date and dialect is likely: see in particular the discussion of Old English *burna* and *brōc*, competing words for 'stream', *ibid.* pp. 91–2.

parsons.indd 171 19/01/2010 19:29:14

in the semantics of the name-type which is at least suggestive. These clan-based groups, extended families if you like, are widespread and significant in the make-up of migration-age kingdoms, or proto-kingdoms. Yet when historical materials for Anglo-Saxon society become available, around about 700 AD, there are no more than weak echoes of *-ingas* groups in the social makeup: the place-names reflect a type of organisation that is characteristic of the earliest centuries, but is generally otiose by the second half of the seventh.[7]

Something similar can be found in one particular element that, again, reflects early territorial arrangements. This is a word, **gē* in Old English, equivalent to Modern German *gau* 'district'. In English the word did not survive to appear in literary texts—a notable point in itself—but it is to be identified in a small group of place-names in the south and east, most prominently in the county-name Surrey, originally the **suðer gē*, the 'southern district' (though of what is disputed). Various of the districts so named can be shown to be old—superseded by other arrangements that were in place later in the Anglo-Saxon period—which again, in combination with the distribution, is suggestive of early date and arguably, because of the geographical limitation, of the direction of travel.[8]

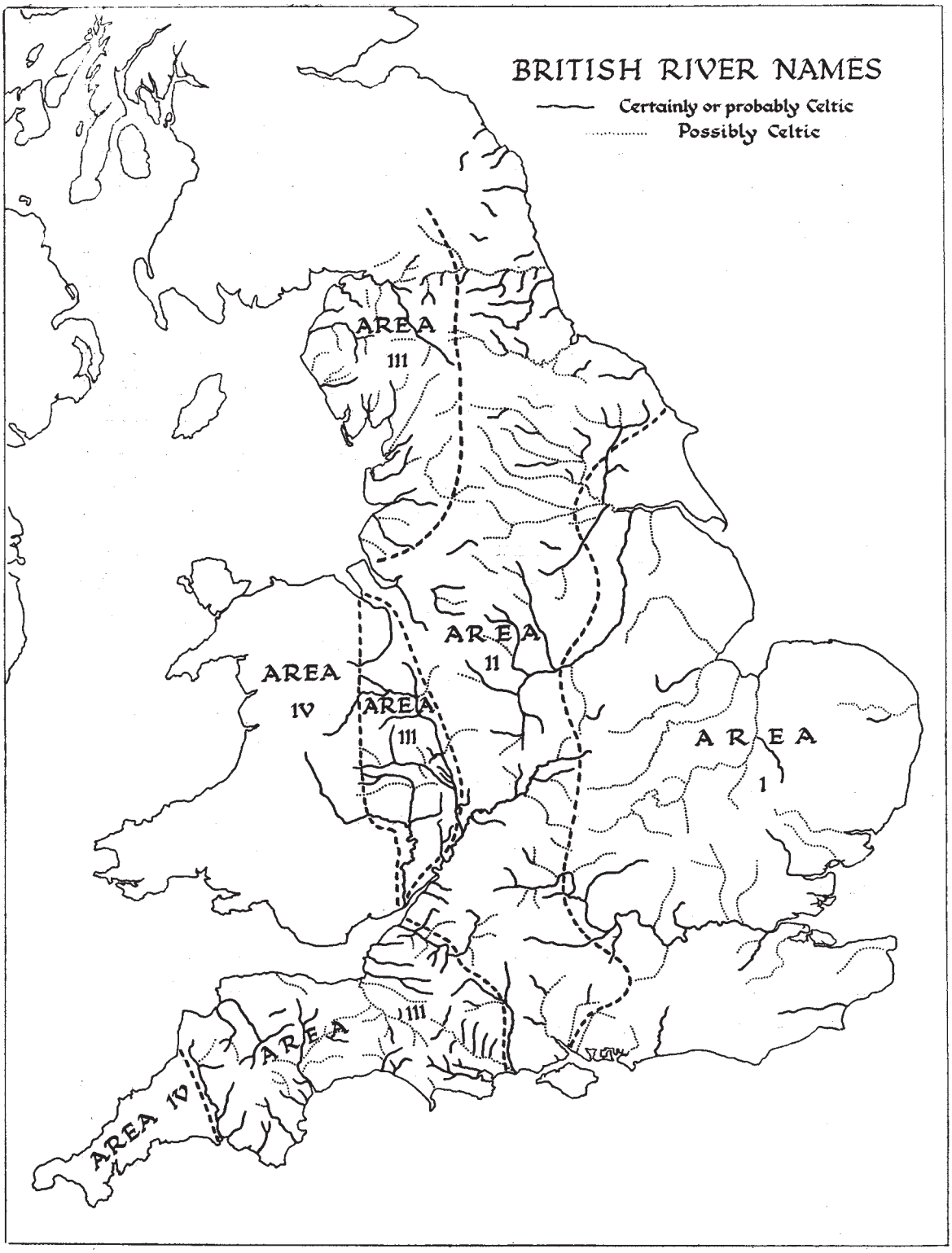
Another type of pointer, of more immediate interest in the present context, comes from the relationship of Anglo-Saxon names with those derived from earlier strata of language, and particularly Brittonic Celtic, or British, the ancestor of Modern Welsh. Anglo-Saxons found woods called, or referred to as, PrimWelsh **cēd*, Welsh *coed*, and thus we have names like Chetwood (literally 'wood-wood') and Lichfield (the *feld* or open land at Romano-British *Letocetum*, equivalent to Welsh *llwyd* + *coed* 'grey wood'); they found hills referred to as *Bre* (Welsh *bre*), and thus we have names like Bredon and Brill (both 'hill-hill'). Above all they found—or, rather, above all they adopted—river-names; and we have early, pre-English names for watercourses across the country. Kenneth Jackson's familiar map of the rivers (1953, 220; Figure 8.1 here), though by now in urgent need of revision, still makes the obvious distributional point very clearly. In essence, the further west you go in Britain, the more Celtic the surviving nomenclature. Take away our historical narrative and there are still enough clues here, I would have thought, to generate a story along the same lines. The structure of a name like Lichfield shows that the Germanic element is added to an earlier Celtic name, so we can deduce that we have English intruding on British, rather than vice versa.[9] It appears natural,

7 Most of the points suggestive of the names' antiquity are set out by Smith 1956, I, 298–301. It must be conceded that to stress these arguments is to swim against the tide of scholarship since the 1960s, which has left *-ingas* names rather uncomfortably belonging to a phase that, while it is relatively early, falls later than the period of accompanied pagan burial (5th–7th centuries). All of this is taken up in Parsons forthcoming.

8 Examples of **gē*, beside Surrey, include Eastry, Lyminge and Sturry, all Kent, Vange, Essex, and probably Ely, Cambridgeshire. On the element see Smith 1956, I, 196–7; Bailey 1998–99.

9 In this case and numerous others, of course, the point is anyway made by the chronology of attestation: Romano-British *Letocetum* is attested (albeit in two badly-copied forms) in sources from the Roman period, whereas Germanic names and additions (like *feld* in this case) only begin to appear in Anglo-Saxon sources.

parsons.indd 172 19/01/2010 19:29:14



8.1. Kenneth Jackson's river-name map from *Language and History in Early Britain*

if it is not perhaps logical, to interpret the distributional pattern in terms of a major Germanic-speaking incursion, spreading but gradually thinning until giving way in the far west to surviving British language; an east to west movement that seems all the more secure given the concentration of Germanic language further east on the Continent. Perhaps it would be theoretically conceivable that our Germanic-speakers made their way first to Ireland, entered from the west, but found the conditions or the reception too hostile until they had made their way across the mountains into the softer lowland zone. To counter this there are supplementary arguments (though I am not sure how watertight they would be) derived from the forms of British names encountered, and effectively fossilized, by the advancing English. Jackson found older sounds in the east of England and British innovations further west. Although, of course, he identifies them as innovations partly because he is using the historical framework of an Anglo-Saxon conquest in order to sequence them (Jackson 1953, 194–261 and Part II, *passim*; Sims-Williams 1990, 237–44). It really is very difficult to divorce ourselves entirely from the contextual information that we have.

Nonetheless, on the kinds of evidence that we have seen, I think it is clear that, in the case of English, we would have a reasonable chance of identifying the direction of the language's advance on the basis of place-name evidence alone, unguided by historical narrative. And, indeed, within Britain we have other instances of place-name patterns that suggest historical incursions for which there is little or no documentary record. Onomastic evidence has been frequently used to flesh out in great detail the briefest of historical references to Scandinavian settlement in eastern England. Although the conclusions drawn have sometimes stretched the evidence too far, there is no doubt that there is considerable historical potential encoded in the names (Abrams & Parsons 2004). In north-west England, indeed, there is extensive name-evidence for the presence of a community of mixed Scandinavians and Gaels, which would not be suspected at all from the written record (Ekwall 1918, 95–103). In such cases I do believe that place-name evidence can realistically suggest its own plausible narratives (albeit that those narratives are not as detailed, circumstantial or precisely dated as the general historian might wish).

But, in all the points that I have considered so far, I concede that I have not really shaken loose from one key piece of information. Behind all of my comments on the progress of Germanic language in England lurks the large block of Germanic speakers in north-central Europe. Behind the Gaels of the north-west are the established Gaels in Ireland, Man and western Scotland. However I dress them up, the best examples that I can find to a large extent distil down to a rather simplistic point about peripheraries and cores, and the inherent likelihood (by definition?) that the periphery derives from the

The absence of plausibly Germanic place-names from the records of Roman Britain does not help Oppenheimer's arguments (cf. 2006, 280–1, 292, where the discussion of toponyms that are not obviously Celtic should not be allowed to imply instead the presence of Germanic. This is a very well understood language-group, which would be recognized if it were present).

parsons.indd 174 19/01/2010 19:29:28

core, rather than vice versa. If what is core and what is periphery comes into question matters are going to be very difficult indeed.

Thus I turn, at last, to ancient Celtic names and some comments on their distribution. By way of introduction it must be said that this is, at least, a very propitious time to be thinking about this topic. The publication, within the last few years, of both John Koch's magisterial *Atlas for Celtic Studies* (2007) and Patrick Sims-Williams' *Ancient Celtic Place-Names in Europe and Asia Minor* (2006) have provided authoritative modern guides to a subject that was previously reliant on ancient and misleading reference works, like Holder's *Alt-celtischer sprachschatz,* and innumerable and very variable regional studies, published in many different lands and languages. The groundwork is at least now in place to begin to look: the questions are how to look, and what to look for.

As Koch (2007, 3–9) and Sims-Williams (2006, 3–4) agree, the general maximal extent of evidence for Celtic speech can best be established by analysis of the place-names and group- or people- or tribal-names recorded in the writings of ancient Europe, which means very predominantly those that come from 'Roman' sources, loosely defined. There is much more information, in many areas, to be gleaned from the records of place-names that are first recorded at a later date—the great majority of the Celtic river-names on the map of Britain fall into this category, for instance—and there remains very much to be done here, especially in works of synthesis; but the indications of classical sources are a good starting-point for the early distribution, and have the advantage—with this chronologically slippery material—of taking us back to at least the first half of the first millenium AD.[10]

The picture that thus emerges is, of course, a familiar one with Celtic language, as defined by its names, covering a great swathe of Europe from Britain and Ireland in the north-west, and much of the Iberian peninsular in the south-west, through Gaul, with parts of the Low Countries in the north, much of the centre of the Continent, with in the south the Alpine regions, down to northern Italy; and east along the Danube to the Black Sea coast and beyond to Galatia. One of the extraordinary facts of the Celtic language-group as revealed by this earliest historical horizon is this huge dispersal, in place across nearly all of its extent by the very earliest records. (Of the major regions, only the extension to Galatia appears to be demonstrably secondary, as it is believed to be attributable to a recorded invasion of the third century BC: Koch 2007, 13.) Another extraordinary feature is the apparent close similarity of the language across its dispersed regions. This is true for the varieties of language revealed by inscriptions, and it is particularly true with the regard to the names (Koch 2007, 9). The point is most clearly made by examples like the nine instances of *Mediolanum*—'the middle plain (place)' or '(the place in) the middle of the plain' (cf. De Bernardo Stempel 2000, 94)—stretching from the site which is now known as Whitchurch, in Shropshire, to northern Italy

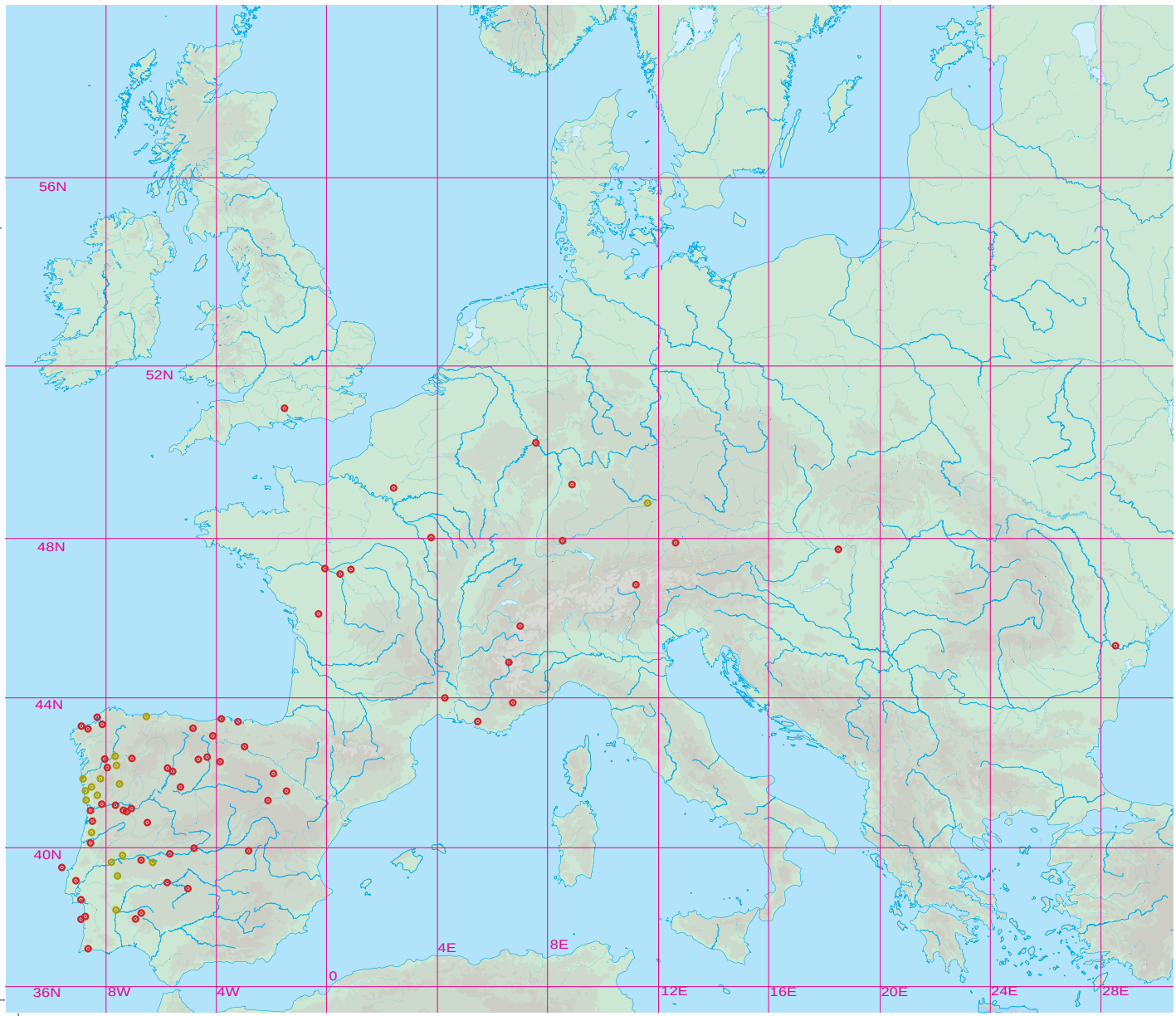
10 The material used here is drawn from Sims-Williams's collections from the *Barrington Atlas*: as he discusses (2006, 16–21) this corpus has its drawbacks, but offers a huge, nearly comprehensive, dataset of early-recorded names.

parsons.indd 175 19/01/2010 19:29:28

and Milan, which, of course, is a direct development of the early Celtic name. Again, there are several places in Gaul called *Noviodunum*, 'the new fort', just as there is one in Dacia, near the western shore of the Black Sea. Such names, together with many other elements, appear in identical form in diffuse distributions encompassing huge distances. The closeness of correspondence is remarkable. But it is not as simple, of course, as everywhere sharing all the same vocabulary. Different patterns of correspondence are to be observed in different terms. And it is indeed these differences—the absence of a single obvious core which might be thought ancestral to the peripheries—which complicate the investigation.

The material mapped here is primarily drawn from Sims-Williams's detailed

8.2. The *-brigā* names of ancient Europe (dark yellow points indicate imprecisely located names).



catalogue, with the occasional addition from Koch's *Atlas*. Sims-Williams himself provides distribution-maps, and these will be closely comparable with those produced here, save in one regard. His careful method was to include in his survey, and map, all instances of particular spellings and groups of spellings from the corpus of names known from classical sources. This made sure of including everything that could conceivably represent particular Celtic elements, but—as he discusses in detail throughout the work—a number of these are clearly 'false friends' which, in their local context, are not to be regarded as Celtic. The maps published here take into account these discussions and exclude, therefore, unlikely instances, principally from the edges of the main distributions.[11]

Figures 8.2–8.5 show the distributions of four widespread name-elements: **brigā*, 'high place, hillfort', cf. Welsh *bre*, 'hill, highland'; **dūno-*, 'enclosure, fort', cf. Welsh *din*, 'stronghold'; **duro-*, 'gated fort?, yard', cf. Welsh *dôr*, 'door, refuge'; **mag-*, 'field, plain', cf. Welsh *ma*, 'plain, place' and Welsh *maes*, 'open country, field'.

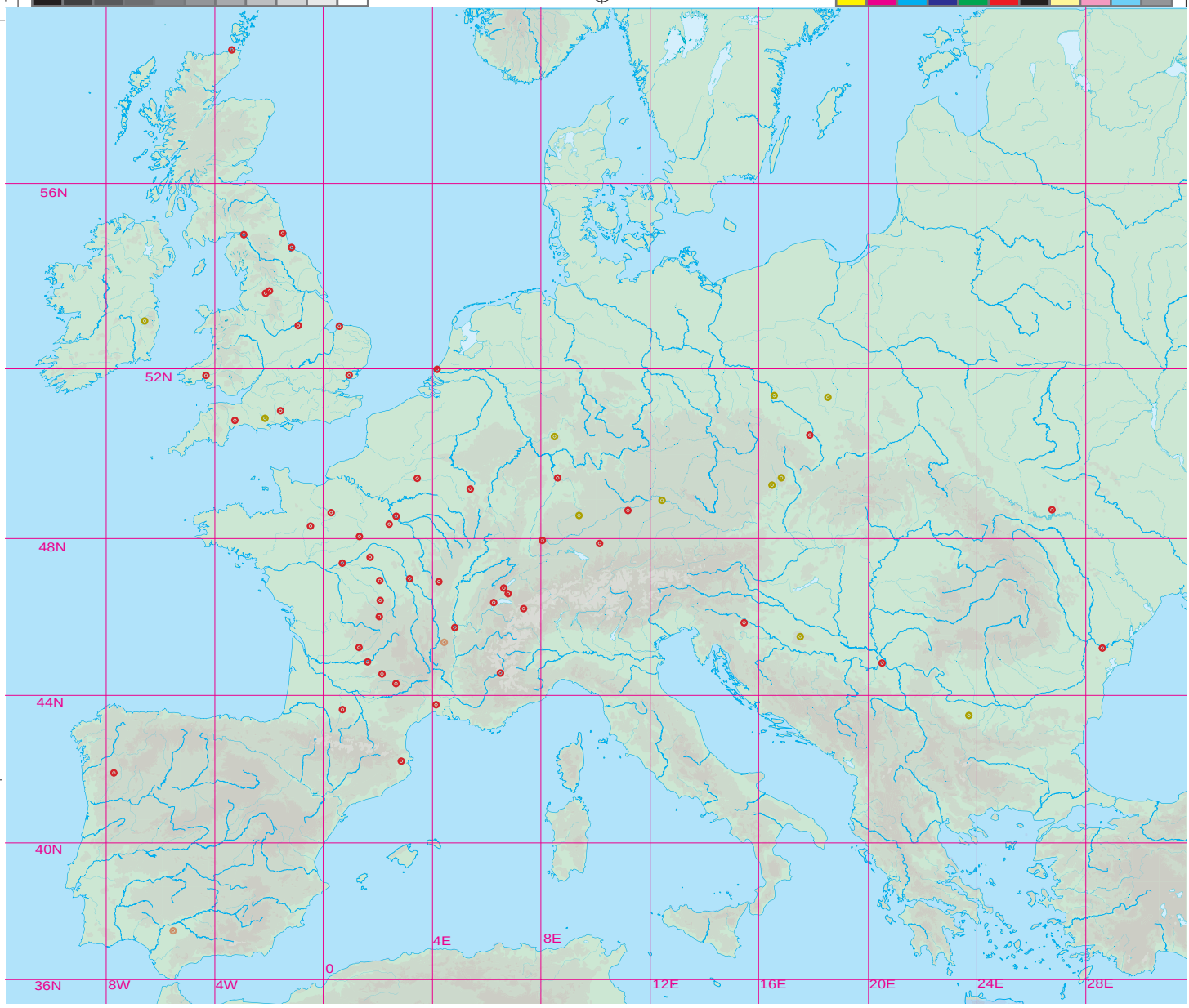
Now the question to be addressed in the present context is: what can be fairly concluded from such names and such distributions? Is there anything here that carries the sort of significance that was attributed to the *-ingas* distributions in Anglo-Saxon England? In that case socio-historical context suggested that the type was an early one, but it is hard to see with these, or with other early Celtic elements, that anything marks one word out as implicitly earlier than another. We would essentially be looking for social and semantic development within prehistoric centuries, and by definition that will be difficult to identify. Yet, if no geographical core is established from the independent indications of history or archaeology, it is difficult to see how else conclusions about the chronology of Celtic language-diffusion can be reached.

That is not to deny that the distributions are interesting and intriguing. But it is to observe that chronological explanations are not easy to sustain. One aspect of the problem is that the varied distributions of these elements—a variety that could be multiplied by reference to many more—are to some extent mutually opposed. Why argue on the basis of the distribution of **brigā*, for instance, that it was an old element going out of use at the period when the Celts reached Britain, when one could equally make the opposite argument: that **dūno-* may have belonged to the original period of British and Continental Celtic, and was going out of use when the language at last reached the Iberian peninsular? These points, and others of similar significance, have been very effectively made by Sims-Williams (2006, 306–9).

The specific argument that **brigā* is significantly early and predates the arrival of Celtic in Britain is the burden of a paper by Helmut Rix (1954), which was taken up and made more widely known by Stuart Piggott (1965, 172–4). For Piggott the hypothesis

11 It should be noted that a few such false friends from otherwise solidly Celtic areas may have slipped through since both Sims-Williams and I have been mainly concerned to investigate problematic cases on the edges of the distributions. Note also that I have followed the suggested identifications of sites accepted by Sims-Williams.

parsons.indd 177 19/01/2010 19:30:04



8.3. The *-dūno-* names of ancient Europe (dark yellow points indicate imprecisely located names.)

could be readily harmonised with the archaeological data of his Urnfield culture. It is interesting to note, then, that archaeological assumptions play no part in Rix's original reasoning: if there were something of substance in his argument, therefore, it would gain great strength from clear correlations with archaeology. Yet in fact the basis of Rix's argument—the reason that he suggests a chronological interpretation of his maps—is very weak (1954, 105).[12] He first observes: (1) that **dūno-* and **brigā* mean much the same

12 Rix maps **dūno-*, **brigā* and **mag-*. The outline distributions produced are certainly broadly comparable with those in the present maps, though there are many differences in detail: he missed many classical sources, now included, but he included an eclectic collection of later-recorded names, excluded here. See Sims-Williams

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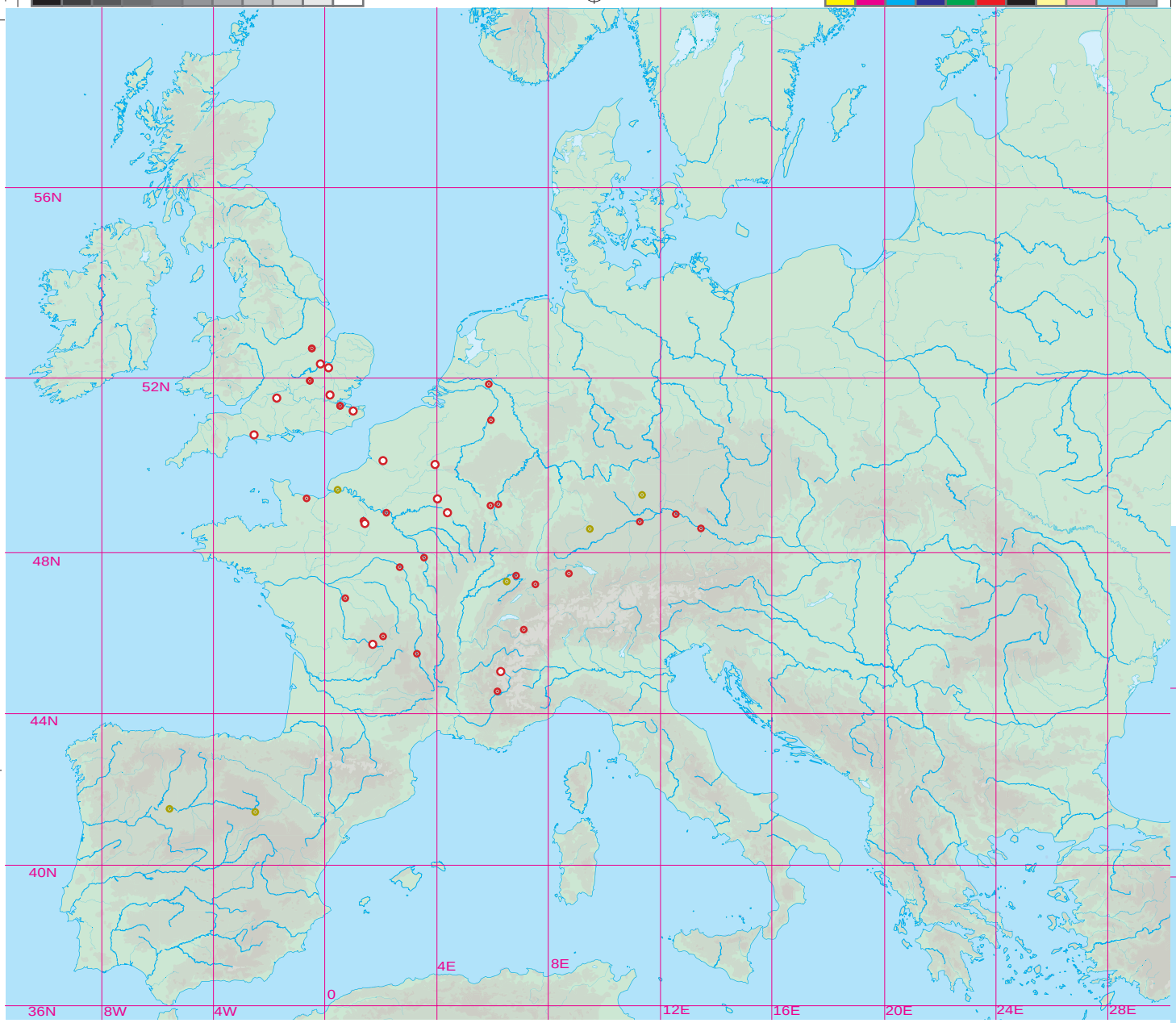
thing, 'fortress, hillfort', and (2) that their distribution overlaps in Gaul. From these observations he draws two conclusions: (1) that they cannot represent contemporary dialectal variation, because of the geographical overlap, and (2) that the difference between them must be a matter of chronology, because it is clearly not a question of semantics: 'es bleibt also nur die chronologische Differenz', 'thus there remains only chronological distinction'. Yet this is very shallow reasoning. On the one hand, contemporary dialectal usage often overlaps, so that it may be dangerous to exclude the possibility that the two words could be used synonymously in the same general area at the same time. On the other hand, and more worryingly, Rix's assertion that **brigā* and **dūno-* simply meant the same thing begs many questions. Although it is clear that the terms were applied, across much of their range, to strongholds and hillforts, it is unreasonable to assume that the usage was necessarily synonymous. To draw, once more, on parallel material from medieval England, it is now clear, after decades of work by Margaret Gelling, that many Old English terms once considered synonymous, as e.g. *dūn*, *berg*, *hyll*, all 'hill', are consistently applied to features of different forms, in this case hills of varying profiles, indicating that semantic distinctions could be fine and precise (Gelling 1984; Gelling & Cole 2000). In the pair of Celtic words under discussion there is certainly some reason to suspect a degree of semantic distinction, because both etymology and later Welsh usage tend to indicate that, although in some areas they could both be applied to a 'hillfort', **brigā* is first and foremost the 'hill', while **dūno-* is in origin the 'fort'. The possibility that in Gaul, where they overlap, some distinction in usage may have been at work can hardly be discounted. Progress could be made here: detailed observation and archaeological study of the places so named in central Gaul might suggest a semantic distinction; or might possibly reinstate, or reverse, Rix's proposed chronology. But, in their own terms, Rix's pioneering proposals are not convincing.[13]

Another attempt to read chronology into the distribution of early Celtic place-names was made by Rivet (1980, 13–15), who suggested that names in **Duro-*, like *Durovernum*, Canterbury, might be characteristically Belgic in dialect, and belong to a later stratum of naming than many of the old Celtic toponyms. The appeal here is to Caesar's account of Belgic migration to Britain and, although it leaves some marginal details of distribution to be accounted for, there may be something to the idea (Sims-Williams 2006, 308–9). In fact, names that begin *Duro-*, as opposed to those in which the term appears in second position, look to form part of a pattern of correspondences linking Britain, and southern Britain in particular, with Gaul, and northern Gaul in particular. Another example, mapped in Figure 5, is **brīvā/*brīvo-*, 'bridge' (as in two British instances

2006, 308.

13 Koch (2007, 4) notes the extraordinary pairing of *Noviodunum* and *Aliobrix*, 'the new fort' and 'the other hillfort', on opposite banks of the Danube near the Black Sea. He suggests that these tend to support Rix's chronology, by implying 'a degree of time depth', though since the names, as they stand, appear to be mutually dependent, this is not straightforward. It is notable that Falileyev (2007, 4) in effect reverses Rix's chronology by taking *Aliobrix* as '"the second/other high (fortified) settlement", the first being perhaps *Noviodunum*'.

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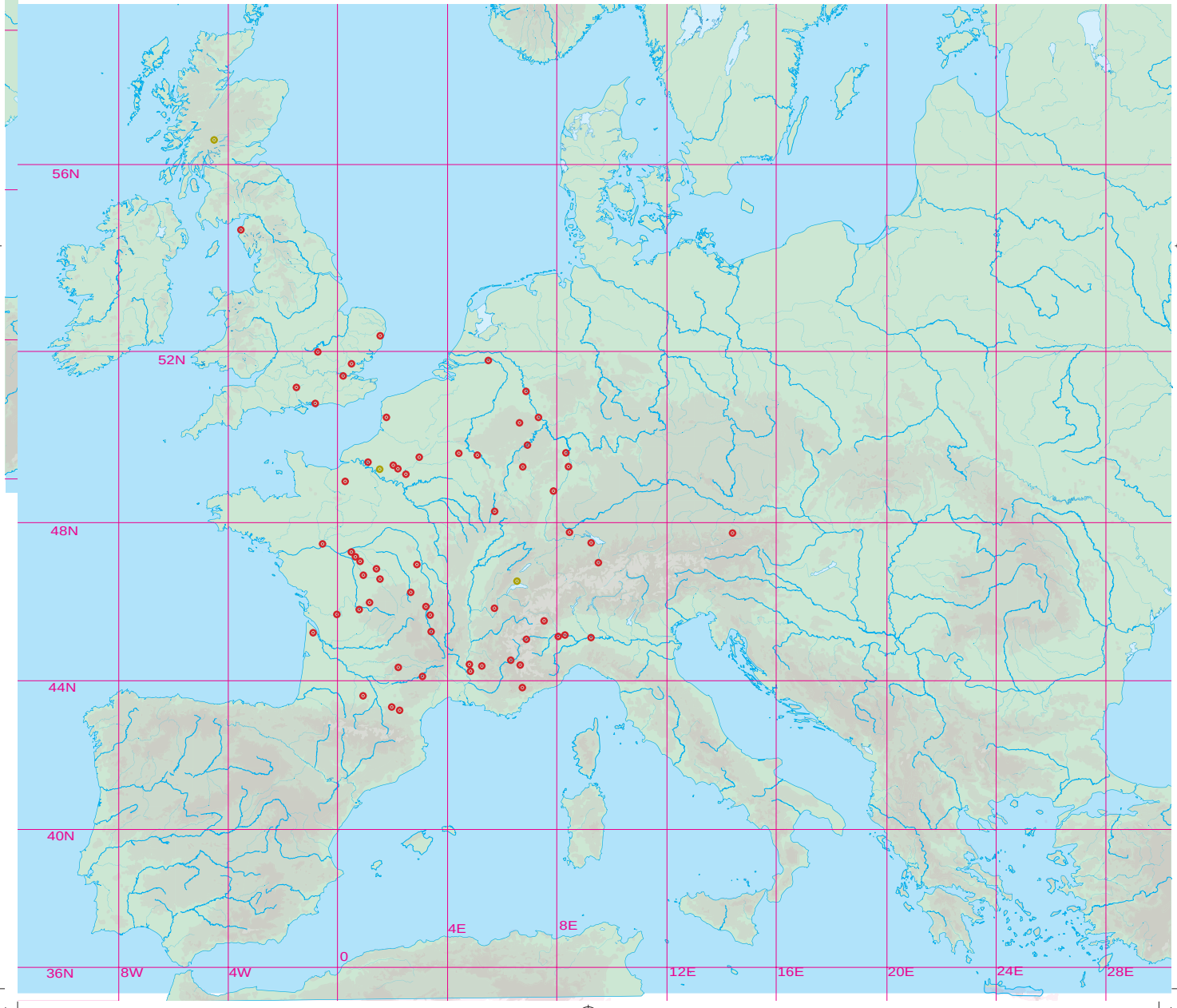
8.4. The *-duro-* names of ancient Europe, open points mark *Duro-* as first element, solid points second element (dark yellow indicates imprecisely located second-element names.)

of *Durobrivae*, where it is combined with **Duro-*); others discussed and mapped by Sims-Williams (2006, 310–11, mapped variously between 328–56) include **verno-*, 'alder, swamp', and **novio-*, 'new'. Together, these elements do tend to suggest dialectal continuity across the sea, and they must raise the possibility of connections—contacts and movements—between areas at some date before the names are recorded. They may perhaps have something to do with Caesar's late Belgic migration, but presumably that story, at the least, suggests the possibility or likelihood of linguistic influence, sometimes as the result of population movement, within the Celtic speech-area in the centuries

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before our names are recorded. The point to be made here is that linguistic movement and development within the larger Celtic area is bound to be a confusing factor in any attempt to deduce 'origins' and the 'earliest dispersal' from the patterns that survive for us. Indeed, it is worth noting that Rix himself, having proposed a chronology in which **brigā* did not survive late enough to enter Britain conceded: 'Damit ist die Möglichkeit einer früheren Keltenwelle in England nicht ausgeschlossen; nur bietet das genannte Material keinen Anhalt dafür' 'this does not mean that the possibility of an earlier Celtic

8.5. The *-mag-* names of ancient Europe (dark yellow points indicate imprecisely located names.)



wave is excluded; but the material under discussion does not support it' (1954, 105 n. 20).

Another noteworthy point arises from the later attestation of some of the words discussed here. Thus whilst **verno-* and **novio-* survive intact in modern Welsh, as *gwern* and *newydd*, there is no clear trace of **brīvā* 'bridge' in the insular Celtic languages. This may be thought to accord **brīvā* a special place in our deliberations, and so it perhaps should, though its loss in Welsh is no mystery in the sense that it was the Latin loanword *pont* that took its place. The **brīvā* names in England might therefore be regarded as typologically early, but in absolute terms that need put them no further back than the earlier, rather than the later, Roman period: hardly earlier, in fact, than they are first attested. These names serve as a reminder that the period of time-depth that we have to play with is a long one. When discussing Anglo-Saxon names, I remarked, in the case of **gē*, 'district', that its absence from recorded Old English texts may be significant of its early date in place-names. Unfortunately, with Celtic languages this becomes a much more diluted criterion. The gap between place-names recorded in, say, the first and second centuries AD and the first extensive written records of Celtic languages, such as might be expected to encompass a good deal of common terminology, is more than half a millennium. This is a very long time in which vocabulary could have been lost by quite usual processes. It will be very hard indeed to argue that terms in ancient place-names are likely to be genuinely early simply because they do not appear in the much later lexicon of Welsh or Irish.

To conclude, therefore, a comparison between the situation in early historic England with that in prehistoric Britain and Europe indicates some hugely significant differences. If there is no certainty as to the core Celtic area, place-name distributions are left floating, begging questions but providing precious few answers. And the problem of time-depth looms large. The enormous geographical spread of the Celtic language-group is largely securely attested by the later first millennium BC. How long could it have been there? If 500 years or more is a realistic suggestion, then we must question the chronological relevance of any patterns that we think we see in the distributions. If such patterns do have significance with regard to movement and linguistic influence, what is to stop them reflecting forces at work many centuries after the original Celticization? In fact this last point is the one to which I would attach some importance in future interdisciplinary research. For good reason it is no longer acceptable to associate some archaeological cultures with the original spread of Celtic language. Yet correlation between archaeological distribution and specific types of place-name continues to be well worth investigating, with the caveat that associations thus revealed may help us to identify some related communities, but by no means necessarily take us back to the original introduction of Celtic language to an area. Better yet, as I have suggested above, would be the focussed archaeological investigation of similarly named places in an attempt to reveal what exactly associated them in the minds of early Celtic speakers.

A further point remains troubling. In his paper on 'Celtic names and Roman

parsons.indd 182 19/01/2010 19:32:42

places' Rivet struggled with the observation that apparently Roman-built towns often acquired descriptive Celtic place-names (1980, 15). One of his suggested solutions was that sometimes, after the original troops had withdrawn, Roman administrators might have asked the locals what they called a place and then adopted it into official usage. Another was that since many auxiliary units of the Roman army 'were raised in Celtic-speaking areas' they may have had a hand in the naming. If this latter were a serious possibility it should cause us to think hard about the basis of our place-name distributions and indeed of our map of Celtic language-spread. Something it brings to my mind is the observation, briefly alluded to above, that the far-flung Celtic place-names are remarkably undifferentiated in the earliest records: 'the appearance', according to Koch (2007, 9), 'is one of an extensive and highly uniform lingua franca'. Would such a lingua franca—if that is an accurate characterization—have arisen in late pre-Roman Europe, representing connections and reconnections made across areas that were in many cases already Celtic-speaking? Or could it alternatively, following Rivet, be something inherent within the Roman Empire? If the names were not themselves being coined by Celtic-speaking legionaries, could there at least not have been a layer of administration, imposing—unconsciously perhaps—some consistency of form on names that, one might have thought would show rather more variety in local pronunciation and representation from Portugal to the Black Sea. After all, as the maps appear so clearly to show, a vast tract of the Romans' territory was populated by Celtic speakers. Many must have found their way into the administration, and even those administrators who did not themselves speak the language would inevitably have become familiar with the toponymy of the major conquered provinces. The uncertain degree to which we are seeing early Celtic place-name distributions through the prism of Roman bureaucracy is yet another complicating factor in this challenging investigation.

parsons.indd 183 19/01/2010 19:32:42

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parsons.indd 184 19/01/2010 19:32:42